WILL THE PEACE LAST?

HAROLD J. LASKI

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I

We do not know where the world is moving; not less important it appears gravely uncertain whether our leaders know. We can list the impersonal forces, economic and social and political, that are at work; we do not know what weight to attach to each. We may guess that, when the final victory comes, Marshal Stalin and General Chiang-Kai-Shek will still lead their peoples; it is less easy to be sure about Mr. Churchill, and still less easy to be sure about President Roosevelt in an election year. It is reasonable to argue that, both in the Far East and in Europe, some form of planned economy is taking shape; but he is a bold man who would prophesy whether it will be socialist in character, or some form of monopoly capitalism which, as it develops, excludes the hope of a wider and deeper democracy. It is difficult to discern in the lineaments of war-time America any novelty but a harsher version of that 'gilded age' which followed the Civil War. Its immense productivity—a capacity beyond all precedent in history—will, no doubt, be an essential element in the organisation of military victory. But as one watches the United States in war-time it is hard to avoid the conclusion that big business has agreed to co-operate in winning the war in exchange for the liquidation of the New Deal. In just what way economic systems so different in purpose can find terms of common accommodation and understanding I do not profess to know; I even venture to doubt whether the discovery is a possible one.

And the danger of this misunderstanding is only one element in the grim pattern that is unfolding before us. Few of us, I imagine, doubt that the Russian decision to make the new Poland round on the East about the Curzon line is a final one; nor can there be many who doubt that the incorporation of the Baltic states in the Soviet Union will be one of the historic results of the war. And if this be an accurate forecast, it is, I fear, only too likely that the Poles will be given "compensation" at the cost of German territory —East Prussia, Danzig, even Silesia. What will happen then when millions of people are forcibly placed under an alien rule, a rule only too likely to feel the need of implacable revenge ? And what is to happen to a Germany which, when we have beaten it into surrender, will feel, I fear inevitably, that nothing matters so much as the recovery of the lands it has lost ? We shall thoroughly disarm Germany, I know; perhaps our rulers, when they met at Teheran, worked out plans to inflict upon its citizens a punishment proportionate to their crimes. I do not deny those crimes; no-one,

like myself, of Jewish race, needs to be convinced of their ugly bestiality. I do not think that since modern history began any rulers have persuaded or driven their citizens into the perpetration of cruelties upon so immense a scale.

There is the Polish problem. It does not, alas, stand alone. Czechs and Norwegians, Belgians and Dutchmen, Greeks and Jugoslavs, Albanians and Austrians, yes, and Italians and Frenchmen, have a long tale of agonised horror to tell which will last as long as the memory of civilised man. And all that one has to record of the evil deeds of Nazism and its supporters, one has to record, too, of Japanese militarism and its ruthless exponents. The temptation to demand an eye for an eye, a life for a life, is one dug deep in the impulses of human nature. We in Britain who have seen London and Plymouth, Bristol and Coventry, do not need to be told how natural is the yearning for revenge. The easiest of all instincts is the one which insists that we lay waste the Germany and Japan which have, with so cold a calculation defamed the dignity of human nature. I do not need to be told that beside Hitler and Tojo, Attila and Torquemada were gentlemen. Never in the history of mankind have so few been responsible for barbarities so great.

A Common Interest

Yet I think it is not too early to make up our minds that a Carthaginian peace will lead directly to a third world war. That we must punish the culprits directly responsible for this ghastly holocaust I do not seek to deny; men of the type of Hitler I admit at once can be killed as one kills a noxious beast in the jungle. But my concern is to make our victory in this war the prelude not to a further conflict but to a lasting peace. I do not believe that it will be such a victory if we think of the peace in terms which breed either in the ordinary German or the ordinary Japanese a sense of frustration which he will seek, by every means in his power, to compensate. I think our victory can be the prelude to lasting peace on the condition only that we find a common interest between all the nations, our enemies as well as our friends. And, so far, the natural wave of deep anger that has swept over the victims of these evil men has stood in the way of finding that common interest. Power-politics led us into this war; as we stand at present we shall merely enter a new phase of power-politics which, one day, will lead us into a new war.

For if we are honest with ourselves we must admit that behind the glowing rhetoric of our leaders' perorations the lust for dominion can be detected without much effort. I do not imagine

that, a generation from now, the student of American diplomatic history will write with any pride of the State Department's intrigues in Vichy and North Africa. I venture to suspect that Mr. Churchill's biographer will not accord his support of King George of the Hellenes a major eulogy in his work; and I am pretty confident that Allied policy in Spain and Italy will seem a mean and ugly thing when the secret documents are published. Perhaps I may add that the record both of Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt in attempting to save the Jews of Central and South-Eastern Europe will hardly, say thirty years from now, seem reasonably proportionate to the effort they might have made. Appeasement of the Arabs has, no doubt, a definite logic about it, as has appeasement of Spain; but anyone who sets those habits alongside the expulsion of the Soviet Union from the League of Nations over the episode of Finland will, I think, find it difficult not to conclude that the Jew and the Spanish Republican have paid the penalty that strong nations always exact from groups whose weakness is unmistakable.

That the first duty of the United Nations is the defeat of the Axis Powers, I admit gladly and freely. But I am unable to see that our leaders have any clear conception of the purpose of victory except victory itself. Mr. Churchill, obviously enough, is concerned above all to maintain the power of Britain as nearly as it stood on September 3rd, 1939; otherwise it is impossible to explain why he rules out of consideration what he euphemistically terms "controversial" legislation. Mr. Roosevelt had largely abandoned the social experiment which made his first two terms a source of hope to most progressive thinkers in the world. The heroism of the Russian people is a thing beyond the power of words to praise; but one would like to be certain—and one cannot be certain—that Marshal Stalin draws his inspiration from Lenin and not from the war against Napoleon I; I cannot help wondering what Lenin would have said about the abandonment of the "Internationale." I suspect that he would not have spoken enthusiastically about Mr. Earl Browder's virtual offer of co-operation with the National Association of Manufacturers. I am far from sure that Jaurès would have recognised in de Gaullisme the principles of the socialism for which he died; and I doubt whether Keir Hardie or Arthur Henderson would have seen in the policy of the British Labour Party, as exemplified by its leaders in the War Cabinet, much else than a tentative approach to that alliance between employers and employed which, outside Britain, is called the corporate state. It is, at least, an interesting intellectual exercise to find the means of serious distinction between the post-war plans, in principle, of Mr. Samuel Courtauld and those of Mr. Ernest Bevin.

II

We are fighting a war that, whatever our leaders may think or say, is not merely a conflict for power, but a genuine and deliberate revolution in ideas. Yet it is difficult to see that the realisation of this fact has penetrated into the minds of men like Mr. Churchill or Mr. Roosevelt. Mr. Churchill wages the war much in the spirit of a twentieth-century Chatham. He has energy, he has daring, he has courage; but he is, above all, the leader of the Conservative Party, and it is within the framework of its traditional principles that he examines the possibilities of reconstruction. Mr. Roosevelt has a mind of greater flexibility, and the man who called for the four freedoms has, obviously enough, thought out the prospect of a peace-settlement in terms which are beyond the capacity of Mr. Churchill. But even Mr. Roosevelt is the prisoner of Congress, and he thinks of the future in a setting which is set by the presidential election of 1944. No electoral fears impinge upon the mind of Marshal Stalin; but there is no utterance of his which suggests any recognition of the depth to which the revolution in the minds of the peoples of the world has gone.

And if the leaders of the United Nations operate within these limits, it is not surprising that their lesser colleagues should do no more than re-echo their thoughts. It is indeed true that in the United States the Vice-President, Mr. Henry Wallace, has sought to make it evident that we stand on the threshold of a new time; but the main result of his argument has been to convince the machine of the Democratic Party that he has outlived his political usefulness. In Britain the Labour leaders do little more than repeat the perorations of Mr. Churchill, with less effectiveness. Some of them seemed to have abandoned any faith in socialist reorganisation and to have taken refuge in the principles of a state-capitalism which few big business men would reject. And in so far as the leaders in exile of Continental Socialist parties give utterance to their views, it is hatred of Germany which seems to provide the basis upon which they erect their hopes. Poles, Belgians, Dutchmen, Norwegians, they tell, not unnaturally, the tale of the agony they have endured; they do not argue that the suffering they have undergone ought to involve a reassessment of economic and political foundations. Nor is the revival of France—in some ways the most hopeful phenomenon of our time—set in the context of a socialistic valuation; rather is it accurate to say that men search to set the rebuilding of the third republic over against the quasi-Boulangisme which threatens its peoples.

End of a Civilisation?

As one examines, in fact, the drift of events, what seems most certainly to emerge is that the civilisation which began with the Reformation is drawing grimly to its close. The productive relations upon which it is based condemn the masses to poverty; and they permit success to the few only at the cost of a ruthless exploitation of the many. So far, moreover, as we can see, the possibilities of that age of scientific abundance upon which, as a matter of technological organisation, we are in a position to enter, are in large part impeded by the contradiction between political forms and economic needs. The mass of petty sovereign states which, not merely in Europe, stand in the way of large-scale well-being serves only to conceal the fact that sovereignty is a method which protects the privileges of the few from being extended to the many. A nation may have a valid claim to independence in the sphere of culture at the present time; but when it assumes the shape of statehood in the economic and political realms, it is pretty obvious that it denies the potentialities of science by so doing.

And there is little evidence that our rulers recognise the implications of that denial. On the economic plane there is little effort to think of the post-war world as one in which matters like investment, tariffs, shipping, aviation, the movement of peoples, are adjusted to the principles which would give scientific research its fullest opportunity; on the political plane, the great powers protect a system of vested interests, of royalty, of aristocracy, of the *haute bourgeoisie,* which prevent the earth being open to the talents in the way that science demands. It is, indeed, hardly an exaggeration to affirm that both Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt display a greater interest in the maintenance of the historic law and order which existed in 1939 than in the adjustment of their categories to the implications of the new world which has been so widely domesticated in the minds of those over whom they rule. Their attitude to France and Italy, to Greece and Jugoslavia, to take instances only, seems to imply that, with the defeat of the Axis powers, we shall have built a Utopian universe.

It is difficult, I suggest, to find the road to hopefulness in a world where those who rule us are moved by such considerations. Compare the implications of the Four Freedoms with the kind of America that is emerging from this conflict. The men who will be the trustees of American destiny after the presidential election of 1944 are not likely to interpret their functions in terms of mass well-being. Even in the midst of war the Congress of the United States is hostile to labour, hostile to reasonable taxation, hostile to

the claim that the fighting men of America may choose its governors; what is it likely to be when the danger it now confronts has passed away? The Parliament of Great Britain offers its citizens benefits like higher old age pensions, better workmen's compensations, higher allowances for the dependants of fighting men. But it only half faces the real problems involved in the Beveridge Report, in the Uthwatt Report, and in the urgent demand for educational change which admits the need to make the nation's schools fitted not to the parental income of its scholars, but to their intellectual capacity.

The Problem of Property

And what is, above all, important in the United Nations is the general unwillingness to confront the problem of property and all that it implies. When the war ends, if I am not mistaken, the mental climate of the United States will be more or less akin to the age of McKinley and Mark Hanna; I do not find it possible to believe that such a United States will help us to build a lasting peace. The intellectual awareness of Great Britain will be more doubtful. For it is highly probable that we shall see widespread revolution upon the European continent, and it is hard to assess the impact of that revolution upon Great Britain. I, centainly, do not find it easy to believe that our rulers will voluntarily make those adjustments in the relations of property which are called for; if they thought them unnecessary in time of war, they are far more likely to repudiate their need in time of peace, when the danger from without has been overcome. But I find it hard not to think that the continent of Europe will see another 1848 and upon a vaster scale. And that raises the grave issue of European reconstruction and how far the United States and Great Britain will make the assistance they can render to reconstruction conditional upon the maintenance there of the kind of law and order of which they themselves approve. I cannot help remembering how, in 1919, Mr. Hoover, as the head of the European Relief Organisation of the time, made food for Hungary conditional upon the return to power of its old feudal masters. Will it be different this time? Will it be different with an American Congress in which men like Senators Wheeler and Reynolds and Congressmen like Thorkelsen hold the balance of power? And can we expect magnanimity from a government in which not only does Mr. Churchill find a place for Lord Croft and Mr. Lennox-Boyd, but from a Parliament in which Lord Salisbury and Sir Herbert Williams on the domestic side, and Lord Vansittart on the international, seem to represent the views of the majority party?

ment is as old as Aristotle—in which men like Hitler and Mussolini are adopted by the property-owning class. But even a Hitler and a Mussolini must somehow satisfy the masses over whom they rule; and the method they invariably adopt is that of a spirited foreign policy which leads to war. Hitler takes Austria and Czecho-Slovakia; Mussolini takes Abyssinia and Albania. Both use the nascent Spanish democracy as the theatre upon which to test the larger experiments in loot, to which not only do they look forward, but upon which they depend for the retention of their power. I am bound to remind you that it is by a hair's breadth only that they were unsuccessful in their attempt. As we look back, Dunkirk and Stalingrad quite obviously rank among the miracles of history. But a civilisation is unlikely to endure if it depends upon miracles for its survival.

The Economics of Abundance

We have reached the stage of economic evolution in which it is simply elementary to insist that the private ownership of the means of production frustrates technological progress and leads to that mass-unemployment which is ultimately fatal to democratic government. I do not need to ask you to compare the productivity of American industry and agriculture today with what they were on that grim morning when President Roosevelt took the oath of office in 1933. I hardly need to remind you what the situation in America would be if the Government of the United States no longer placed its orders with its manufacturers. I take the United States as my example because if a new Karl Marx were to describe the dynamic of capitalism in 1944, instead of 1867, he would clearly select America as the supreme example to investigate. And from all this I draw the inference that we must plan our civilisation in peace as well as war. But if we are to plan it in a democratic way then there is no way but socialism through which we can reach our goal. For only through socialism can we hope for planned production for community consumption. Only in a socialist society can we look for that economics of abundance which is the way out of war.

IV

If I am asked whether we may hope to attain this end, the frank answer is that, so far as any time in which we are involved is concerned, I simply do not know. No one admires more than I do the courage and tenacity of Mr. Churchill in an epoch of war;

I see very little evidence that these qualities are likely to be displayed by him when at last we enter the era of peace. That Mr. Roosevelt has done great things for his people—above all he has given them a supreme lesson in adult education—I should admit without hesitation; but since, at any rate, Pearl Harbour it has not been easy to detect in the White House that mind and head which charted the Four Freedoms. Marshal Stalin has proved beyond doubt the depth of his determination and insight as the leader of the Russian people; I am not prepared to prophesy that his rebuilding of the Soviet Union will equal in audacity and power the epoch of its primary construction. Nor do I see on the horizon of international politics those leaders who will take over from the great figures of the war the tasks of healing and of renovation that will need so swift and urgent an attention.

The Gift of New Life

Above all, as victory begins to unfold itself, there are two grim ghosts which will haunt the men and women who give their engeries to the building of a peaceful world. The first, and perhaps the ugliest, of these spectres is hatred. It will be, on any showing, a hard task to accomplish the reintegration of Germany into the family of nations. The last war, compared to this war, was a clean war; I doubt whether since the Thirty Years' War there has been any conflict in which barbarism on so vast a scale has been so deliberately practised as by the Germans and the Japanese. The memories they will have left are not of the sort that die quickly; for the crucifixion of whole peoples hews its way into the tradition of history. The second spectre is that of fatigue, a threat to our power of recovery of which it will take us long to measure the cost. And I fear that fatigue will intensify hatred, simply because it will prolong the time in which the scars of war will be healed. Looking at these evil ghosts, I cannot but think that it will require from us all a special effort of exceptional intensity if we are to avoid the horror of a new dark age. For what has been cast into the abyss in this war is the very principle by which men attain accepted spiritual values. We are part of a dying civilisation; and we have to recover, somehow, the gift of a new life.

I do not profess to determine whether the lesson of this war has been learned by enough of us to make our victory the parent of a peace that will endure. When we have rid the world of Hitler and Mussolini, of Tojo and Himmler, and of those lesser gangsters who have put their knives at civilisation's throat, there will still remain a mass of ugly men and women, some of them the more dangerous because we are not agreed upon their ugliness. Father

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sions; and, in the second, it has still to be shown that communities which use their sovereignty for ends so different can be united as well by peace as by war. It is difficult to assume that this will be easy in the light of the history of the League of Nations. It is still more difficult to believe that the domination of the great powers will build a road on which, at an equal pace, the smaller powers will march to increased well-being. Security still seems most likely to be born of a peace it is in the interests of all nations to preserve. That does not seem the temper in which we approach its making. We may even doubt whether a Carthaginian peace conceals its nature by being termed "hard" instead.

H. J. L.

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